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May 31, 1901

A new law, which deserves imitation, is being discussed in Yucatan, with good chances of being enacted. It is as follows: "No official document or contract will be valid, unless the signers can show good marks of vaccination or evidences of a previous attack of the disease."

Respectfully,

S. H. HODGSON,

Acting Assistant Surgeon, U. S. M. H. S.

The SURGEON-GENERAL,

U. S. Marine Hospital Service.

Inspection of Coatzacoalcos, Juilie, Tehuantepec and Salina Cruz.

VERA CRUZ, MEXICO, May 18, 1901.

SIR: Pursuant to your telegraphic instructions, I visited Coatzacoalcos and made an inspection of the various points along the isthmus as far as Salina Cruz.

I have the honor to submit the following report: Coatzacoalcos is a coast town about 125 miles south of Vera Cruz, with a population of about 4,000 inhabitants. The place has been largely built up by the firm of Pearson & Son, engineers, and agents for the Mexican Government, and has at present quite a large European and American population employed in the building of port works, and the reconstruction and operation of the railroad running across the isthmus.

Its greatest elevation is about 20 feet above the sea level and slopes rather abruptly toward the center of the town. On this elevation the company have built most of their dwellings—frame buildings for their officers.

Its surface presents a dreary sand area, with only the buildings and native huts to break the monotony of the view.

No sanitary regulations are enforced, and all refuse of the place is strewn over the surface of the town making a state of filth impossible to describe.

At present the predominating causes of death are the diarrheal diseases, principally dysentery. During the summer of 1900 the place was visited by a most malignant epidemic of yellow fever, which only died out when the last inhabitant incurred the disease. Natives and foreigners were alike attacked, several physicians died, and the number of deaths from the disease is not known to this day. It was the most malignantly infected port in the gulf, and, for its size, in the world. No yellow fever epidemic during the past decade gives such a history. The disease was declared epidemic in May and suddenly stopped in July for want of material, leaving an unestimated mortality. Later, I think toward the last of August, there was a small importation of non-immunes, when the disease quickly asserted itself, dying out again for want of material. This year there has been but little fever, only 3 cases reported in April, and these were brought into Coatzacoalcos for treatment.

At present, material in the shape of nonimmunes is lacking, but the place and the buildings are unquestionably infected, as no disinfection has been practiced, and all the conditions are favorable for the spread of the disease as soon as a fresh importation of laborers is made.

The local sanitary authorities seem to have absolutely no conception of sanitation, and, unfortunately, the construction company is at present unable to take control of the situation. This company is engaged in harbor improvements and railroad constructions, amounting to many millions of dollars, and they fully appreciate the gravity of the situation.

In conversation with Mr. Body, the Pearson's' representative, I was informed that arrangements were being made by which they can take some part in the municipal government of the place, when they would be able to detail engineers to sewer the city and otherwise improve its sanitary condition. The government is now having surveyed and appraised the entire real estate property of Coatzacoalcos, condemning it and purchasing it from the individual property owner. The municipality will then become federal property and its affairs will be managed by Pearson & Son during the construction of the harbor works and their management of the Tehuantepec Railroad.

I visited Juilie, Tehuantepec, and Salina Cruz, on the Pacific coast.

Juilie is a railroad junction and furnished the 3 cases of yellow fever sent to Coatzacoalcos in April.

Tehuantepec has a population of 15,000, and is the principal city of the isthmus. Several cases of yellow fever have occurred this year.

Salina Cruz is the seaport of Tehuantepec, and has also furnished several cases of yellow fever this year. Salina Cruz has no harbor, and Pearson & Son are now engaged in harbor construction and will engage a large amount of labor. I was informed before leaving Vera Cruz that it was intended to import Chinese labor for some of this work, but I learned on inquiry that this scheme has been abandoned on account of the great expense of transportation.

Diarrheal diseases prevail all along the line, and I devoted most attention to the investigation of their nature. I saw many of the cases and found them all to be cases of dysentery.

Cholera prevailed some years ago in Tehuantepec, but none of the cases I was able to see could be taken for anything but dysentery. Coatzacoalcos is rapidly developing into an important seaport, and its commercial importance will increase with the completion of the railroad across the isthmus. The Cayo Line of British steamers, leaving here for the United States, touches there, as do many of the Norwegian tramps. Then the Mexican coastwise steamers do a heavy passenger and freight traffic between there and this port.

A great many of these passengers go on to the United States, either by rail across the border or by steamer from Vera Cruz.

On this account I have tried to exercise some supervision over such travel to the United States. They all claim to hail from Vera Cruz or some other port, and during the epidemic last year at Coatzacoalcos many were able to pass through undetected.

It is impossible to keep fully informed as to the conditions there unless some one is constantly on the ground.

Baggage from Coatzacoalcos for the United States should be disinfected, either here in Vera Cruz or at the port of arrival, but frequently it is impossible to determine the origin of all passenger baggage.

In conclusion, I would respectfully recommend that the Service be represented at Coatzacoalcos in order that exact information may be entered on bills of health, so that positive information could be obtained as to existing conditions, and in order that this office be constantly informed as to passengers and baggage from there.

Respectfully,

D. E. DUDLEY,
Acting Assistant Surgeon, U. S. M. H. S.

The SURGEON GENERAL,
U. S. Marine-Hospital Service.